

## STAMP STORIES

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Here in the Seattle area where I live, we have a very fine “oldies” radio station that I enjoy. The other day, I heard them play a song by Jimmie Rodgers titled, “Kisses Sweeter Than Wine.” This love song was a hit for Rodgers in 1957, but it was written and originally recorded by The Weavers in 1950.



Lenz Moser Wine  
Austria, 2012, Sc#2414

The USPS issued a 13-cent stamp to commemorate Jimmie Rodgers as the first stamp in its Performing Arts series on 24 May 1978. There are a total of 12 stamps in this series issued between 1978 and 1999.

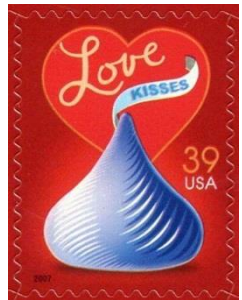
Now, I like wine very much and recently even joined the Wine on Stamps study unit, but unless you are talking about ice wine, or some other type of dessert wine, I do not find that beverage very sweet. In fact, some types are downright sour.

As I thought about this, it occurred to me that it would make more sense if the girl of the song had “kisses sweeter than chocolate.” Now, there is something I could wrap my lips around, so to speak.

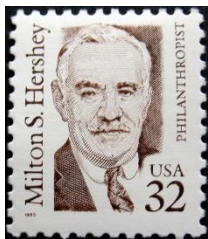


Jimmie Rodgers  
US, 1978, Sc#1755

On 13 January 2007, the USPS issued a booklet pane of 20 self-adhesive stamps depicting a Hershey’s Kiss as one of its continuing Love series and commemorating the candy’s 100th anniversary. There is hardly any American who is not familiar with this popular chocolate treat. The stamp was designed by Derry Noyes and printed by Avery Dennison.



Hershey's Kiss  
US, 2007, Sc#4122



M.S. Hershey  
US, 1995, Sc#2933

These candy “kisses” are made by the Hershey Company founded by Milton S. Hershey in 1894. It is the largest manufacturer of chocolate in North America, and one of the oldest chocolate companies in the US.

On 13 September 1995, as part of its Great Americans series, the USPS honored the company’s founder himself on a 32-cent self-adhesive stamp designed by Dennis Lyall and printed by the Banknote Corporation of America.

The average American eats about 12 pounds of chocolate every year. Chocolate is one of the most popular foods in the world. Chocolate is even included in US military rations. In fact, the majority of chocolate issued to US military personnel is produced by the Hershey Company.

As an emergency field ration, military chocolate is very different from normal chocolate bars. Because its intended use is as an emergency food source, it is formulated so that it would not be a tempting treat that troops might consume before they needed it. I can personally attest that the tropical bars in the military sundries pack tasted more like a bar of soap than a bar of chocolate. These bars are also formulated to withstand high temperatures.

Chocolate is a New World product. The cacao tree is native to South America. Evidence indicates that the Maya were producing chocolate drinks as early as the 5th Century. They cultivated and harvested the cacao seeds and used them to brew a beverage that they consumed with every meal.

Spanish explorers introduced chocolate to Europe in the 16th Century.

The cacao tree (*Theobroma cacao*) is a small evergreen tree that may reach a height of 25 feet. The flowers are produced in clusters directly on the trunk and older branches. This formation is known as cauliflory.

Unlike many flowers that are pollinated by various species of bees, cacao flowers are pollinated by tiny midges of the *Forcipomyia* genus.

The cacao pods are ovoid and grow to about 6–12 inches long and 3–4 inches wide. They weigh about one pound when ripe.



Cacao tree & harvesting pods  
Samoa, 1952, Sc#209

The ripe pods are yellow to orange color and contain between 20–60 seeds embedded in a white pulp. It takes about 400 dried seeds to make one pound of chocolate.

Some countries use the pulp to make juice, smoothies, and jelly. The fermented pulp is distilled into a popular alcoholic beverage.

Cacao is one of 22 species of *Theobroma*, which translates to “food of the gods.” Many will agree with this appellation.

Cultivation of cacao began in ancient times, most likely in what is now Peru. At first, the fruit pulp was probably used to make fermented beverages. Early Mesoamericans imported the trees from South America, perhaps as early as 1900 BC.

Archaeologists have found cacao residue in ceramic vessels at several prehistoric sites in southern Mexico and Central America.



Ripe cacao pods  
Mexico, 1981, Sc#1237; Venezuela, 2015, not cat



Arrival in France  
France, Sc#3782c

After its introduction in Europe, the demand for chocolate as a beverage spread and led to the establishment of cacao plantations in the tropical colonies of Spain and France. Today, cacao is a major agricultural product in countries in West Africa, South America, and the East Indies. Ivory Coast leads the world with 1.3 million metric tons produced in 2005.

After harvesting, the pulp and seeds are removed and the rind is discarded. The pulp and seeds are then laid out for several days while they undergo “sweating,” where the thick pulp liquefies as it ferments.

The fermented pulp trickles away, leaving the seeds behind for collection. Sweating is important for the quality of the seeds, which originally have a strong bitter taste. If sweating is interrupted, the resulting cocoa may be ruined. If underdone, the seed has a flavor like raw potatoes and becomes susceptible to mildew.



Drying cacao seeds  
Dominica, 1954, Sc#143

To make chocolate, the seeds are roasted and shelled. The resulting pieces are called nibs and are used directly in cooking, or for snacking.

Most nibs are ground into a thick paste called chocolate liquor, which is further processed into chocolate by adding more cocoa butter and sugar, and sometimes vanilla and other ingredients. The liquor can also be separated into cocoa powder and cocoa butter using hydraulic or chemical processes.



Swiss chocolate centenary  
Switzerland, 2001, Sc#1100

Several countries have produced stamps featuring chocolate themes. Some recent issues have even incorporated a chocolate aroma like the scratch and sniff coating on the Swiss stamp pictured here.

Chocolate and cocoa are enjoyable for their own sake, but recent studies have revealed that they also offer many health benefits. Cocoa is a rich source of antioxidants and flavonoids, which may impart anti-aging properties and may have beneficial cardiovascular effects.

Chocolate is also a stimulant and studies have found short term benefits in reducing LDL cholesterol levels from dark chocolate consumption.

Foods rich in cocoa appear to reduce blood pressure and it is believed that health benefits may extend to the brain and have important implications for learning and memory.

All this writing has suddenly made me hungry. I think I will stop now and have a bowl of chocolate ice cream.